



Resources

Quest for QUALITY

PODCAST

Episode 12 | SEL Building Blocks, Part 1

Conscious Discipline

Check out the Conscious Discipline website for FREE resources for use in your program, classrooms, or even at home. Be sure to check out the [S.T.A.R. Breathing video!](#)



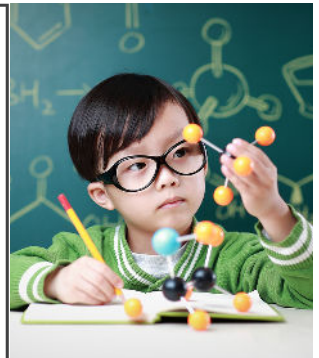
Building Resilient Schools and Homes Cop

This FREE 5-week series is based on Conscious Discipline principles focusing on how to build the school/classroom family and resiliency in adults and children. This is typically offered in the spring and fall in ELRCs 8, 9, & 10.



Start Strong: Social Emotional Foundations & Resiliency in Infants & Toddlers

This FREE 5-week series is based on Conscious Discipline principles focusing on infant and toddler brain builders and resiliency. This is typically offered in the spring and fall in ELRCs 8, 9, & 10.



Powers of Resilience - Social Emotional Learning for Adults

This FREE 5-week series focuses on how to build social emotional learning in adults. This series is a deeper dive in to adult SEL and how adults' regulation affects both the children in their care and their relationships with other adults. This is typically offered in the winter and summer in ELRCs 8, 9, & 10.



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Provider-Parent Relationships: 7 Keys to Good Communication

If we want children to thrive in child care settings, then it makes sense to intentionally build positive relationships with the adults who play the largest roles in the children's daily lives: their parents*. Good communication is essential for building those relationships, but good communication doesn't just happen. As child care professionals, we must be reflective and intentional about achieving effective parent-provider relationships through good communication.

Below are seven steps that child care professionals can take to set the stage for a positive partnership.



The Seven “Be’s” of Effective Communication with Parents

Be interested. As child care professionals, before we ever open our mouths to speak, we should first reflect on our attitude toward parents. We should ask ourselves some questions that help determine our interest in parents: “Am I interested in you as a person? Am I curious about what you think, what your experiences and perspectives are? Do I want to hear what you have to say?” It is easy to tell when someone is truly interested in another person. We can hear it in their voice and see it on their face. And it makes a big difference in the way the other person responds. To establish constructive relationships with parents, the very first step is to show genuine interest in each parent and family and to convey that interest in each interaction, starting from the first. Remind yourself often that every person has a story, and every family has a unique life.

Be humble. Although it may be true that child care professionals know a lot about young children and their care and learning, parents can sometimes feel intimidated or put off by this expertise, especially if the child care provider comes across as all-knowing. The truth is that there is a lot that child care professionals don't know, especially about any individual child. If our goal is to work with parents for the well-being of their child, it is helpful to maintain a view of ourselves and parents as co-contributors, with each having valuable but insufficient information that is needed to understand how best to support the child. When we approach parents with an attitude of curiosity and humility, parents in turn will be more likely to approach us and seek out our opinions and suggestions. Then we can figure things out together, which always has a better outcome for children.

Be respectful. Most child care professionals say they believe parents are children's first teachers. But sometimes we don't come across as respecting that role when we are talking with parents. Even if we happen to disagree with a parent's decision or viewpoint, it's still important to maintain an attitude of respect for the parent's role and for the values and experiences that shape their decisions.

Be intentional about expressing your belief that parents want what's best for their child and that their role as the parent is incredibly important, even when you may not agree with a specific decision or approach. When you acknowledge and affirm parents in this way, it helps establish trust and opens the way for dialogue in which your viewpoint is more likely to be considered.

Being respectful also means doing everything possible to make sure that communication barriers are overcome. To communicate with parents who have limited English proficiency or a disability that affects communication, look for resources and supports that facilitate communication between you and those parents.

Be inviting. We can't assume that families know that we want to hear their perspective. Although much of our conversation with parents will be about the child, also expressing an interest in the parent is likely to invite a deeper level of trust and openness. For a variety of reasons, some parents need to be intentionally invited to communicate with us. And nothing invites communication like being asked a good question! Ask questions that show you are interested and are paying attention. Ask open-ended questions that invite thoughtful response. Ask follow-up questions that reflect sincere interest in what the parent is sharing. To help develop question-asking skills, try practicing with other providers/teachers during staff or professional development meetings.

Be a good listener. Most people don't have a natural talent for listening. But anyone who has had the experience of being in a conversation with a good listener will appreciate the powerful effect it can have on the quality of the dialogue and the relationship. So how do we listen well? Here are a few tips:

- Convey the message "I'm listening" with your eyes, face, and body as well as with your words.
- Wait for a response. Allow pauses. Don't be too quick to jump in. Some people are very quick to speak, and others take more time to translate thoughts into words.
- Be wholly in the moment. This can be challenging in a busy, noisy child care setting, but do your best to give a parent your full attention, even if it's only for a brief moment during pick-up or drop-off time. If you or the parent want to have a longer, more serious conversation, move to a quieter place so that you can give him/her your full attention. If that isn't possible, apologize for not being able to focus fully and set up a phone call or meeting for another time.

Be positive. Don't communicate only when there is a problem or concern, or when you want something from a parent. When parents come to expect only negative messages, they are likely to avoid the messenger. When the major communication time is during drop-off and pick-up, problems and concerns tend to be the messages that are communicated because they are the most urgent. A proactive, multilayered communication plan, on the other hand, can help keep the majority of the messages to families positive, constructive, and encouraging. Share fun stories and be sure to tell parents about the positive things you observe in their child. Be particularly mindful of sharing positive stories and comments with military families during the stressful times of deployment, reunification, and relocation. Parents will most likely be worried about how their child is faring during these times. Your encouraging, positive words will go a long way toward easing that worry.

Be creative. Never before have we had so many different ways to communicate with one another! Child care professionals need to take advantage of as many of these methods as necessary to meet the needs and preferences of families. Families are busy, busy, busy! Better to send the same message multiple ways and risk minor annoyance than to rely on one way of communicating that isn't effective for all parents. Ask individual family members often whether they are getting information that you send out to all of the families and to them in particular. Never assume that they actually see the note you put in their child's backpack or the news post on your Facebook page. Be creative. Be responsive. If covering all

these ways of communicating feels like too much, ask parents, interested staff, and/or volunteers to help.

When communicating with military parents, it's especially important to ask them about the best methods for communicating, particularly during deployments. The best methods will depend heavily on the technology at their location and Operational Security (OPSEC) restrictions for their mission. [Read more about challenges to communicating with military parents and suggestions for overcoming them in this article.] We may need to go an extra mile or two to keep a deployed parent in the loop, but the extra effort is well worth it in helping them feel confident and involved while away from their children.



The Benefits of Good Communication

Research indicates that children benefit when those who are most involved with their everyday well-being and learning have warm, meaningful communication. Those benefits can be seen at many levels. Children notice how we get along with their parents, and they hear how we talk together (or notice that we don't). When providers deepen their conversations with parents to the point when they become true collaborators in children's care and learning, children benefit exponentially. Intentionally establishing good communication with parents from the start will also make it easier to work through difficult conversations that may arise later.

** Although most of the time the primary caregivers will be a child's parents, that is not always the case. Particularly for dual-military and single parents, primary caregiving may at times be shared with grandparents or other extended family members or close friends. Throughout this article, we've used the term "parent," but all of the information and recommendations apply to whoever is providing primary care for the child at home.*

For More Information

To learn more about ways child care providers can support and communicate with families, check out the following eXtension Alliance for Better Child Care articles and other resources:

Coping with Change: Young Children in Military Families Find Comfort in the Familiar

Supporting Dads in Child Care: Let's Play!

Supporting Young Military-Connected Children When They Are Most Vulnerable

Reschke, Kathy. If I'd Only Known: Enhancing Parent-Provider Communication. eXtension Military Families Learning Network blog post.

Powers, Stephanie. The Power of Partnerships. July 2009 issue of the Zero To Three Journal.

Diffily, D., & Morrison, K. (1996). Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs. Available from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) online store at <http://bit.ly/10QPzfk>.

1. Tell a child what to do instead of what not to do.
2. Show the child by modeling or using a picture of the action.
3. Clearly and simply state what you expect the child to do.
4. Remember young children might have inappropriate behavior because they don't understand the social rules of an activity or interaction.
5. Communicate, with words, signs, or pictures, using language they might understand.
6. Encourage children in a way that lets them know that they are exhibiting the desired behavior
7. Be enthusiastic and generous with encouragement. Children can never get enough!

Examples:

Avoid	Say/Model	Remember
Don't run!	Walk; Stay with me; Hold my hand	Way to go! Look at you moving safely. Thanks for walking!
Stop climbing!	Keep your feet on the floor	Wow! You have both feet on the floor!
Don't touch!	Keep your hands down; Look with your eyes	You are being safe; you are looking with hands down!
No Yelling!	Use a calm voice; Use an inside voice	(In a low voice) Now I can listen; you are using a calm (inside) voice.
Stop whining!	Use your words/signs/pictures/device so I can help you	Now I can hear you; that is so much better. Show or tell me what's wrong.
Don't stand on the chair!	Sit on the chair	You are sitting on the chair! Wow you're sitting up big and tall!
No coloring on the wall	Color on the paper	Look at what you've colored! Tell me about your picture.
Don't throw your toys!	Play with the toys on the floor	You're playing nicely and keeping the toys on the floor. Your friends are having fun playing with you!
Stop taking big bites!	One bite at a time; chew first, and then you can have another bite.	Great job taking small bites, you are eating safely!
Don't play in the water/sink!	Wash your hands	Thanks for washing your hands! I can tell they are really clean!
No biting!	We only bite food; Show or tell me if you're upset (give the child appropriate words, signs, or visuals to use to express emotion)	You're upset, thanks for sharing that with me!
Don't hit!	Hands are for playing, eating, and hugging; Use your words or signs (give the child appropriate words, signs, or visuals to use to express emotion)	You are being gentle! Good for you!

Self-Regulation & Resilience

First Three Years of Life

1. Create a mental model of relationship (WE)
2. Create a mental model of self (I)
3. Create baseline for managing stress
4. Create set points for attention and motivation as a side effect of 1 – 3 mentioned above

Self-Regulation: Developing Inner Resources

Self-regulation is the ability to manage your thoughts, feelings and behaviors in accordance with the demands of the situation. It is a set of skills that enables children, as they mature, to direct their own behavior towards a goal, despite the unpredictability of the world and our own feelings. This maturation takes roughly 24 years.

Research consistently shows that self-regulation is the skill necessary for emotional well-being, life success and academic achievement.

- **Behavior Self-Regulation** is the ability to act in your long-term best interest, consistent with your deepest values (*violating one's deepest values causes guilt, shame and anxiety, undermining well-being*).
- **Emotional Self-Regulation** is the ability to calm yourself down when you're upset and cheer yourself up when you're down.
- **Thought Regulation** allows us to be mindful of our thoughts in order to identify and change destructive or disturbing thought patterns that influence behavior and emotions in destructive ways.

Self-Regulation Takes Two (2)

1. Self-regulation refers to the “self-altering of its own responses or inner states.” It requires ME (1) regulating ME (2). **It takes 2** (*the higher centers regulating the lower centers of the brain*).
2. Young children up to the approximate age of 6-years-old do not have mature inner speech. They operate as a 1. We must co-regulate with them before they can self-regulate.
3. Toxic stress and unresolved trauma in adults and children shut down the higher centers of the brain, leaving adults/children to be a 1.
4. When we are triggered by outside situations, we become a 1 acting out our emotions and projecting negative thoughts onto others or using critical self-talk of hatred toward the self.
5. A predictable, calming, consistent, attuned caregiver is the most critical factor in the acquisition of self-regulatory abilities.
6. Self-regulation is housed in the prefrontal lobes of the brain and is part of the executive functions needed to be the CEO of the brain.
7. Self-regulation drives the reflection system. Without self-regulation, reflection of the self, behavior, and others is limited.
8. Self-regulation and executive function skills are vital for success and are the best predictors of academic and life success.
9. The ability to self-regulate is one of the most important protective factors in relation to resilience.



Mental Models

We think of ourselves as conscious human beings who make rational choices. Yet as psychology and physiology have shown, most of our behavior is governed by our unconscious mental models and set points.

Mental Model: A mental model is an internal symbol or representation of external reality. It is an image of the world around us, which we carry unconsciously in our head. An example of a mental model is either that the world and the people in it are trustworthy or they are not trustworthy. Another example is either that I am loveable and deserving love or I am not loveable and not deserving love. Our definition of love itself is a mental model.

Set Points: Set points refer to the preferred level of functioning of an organism. Neuropsychologist Richard Davidson, PhD, defines a set point as a predisposition to feel a certain way and a baseline to which we quickly return (Davidson, 2003). We have a wide variety of set points in our brains, bodies and behaviors. We have set points for happiness, anger, hormones, stress and moods. These set points are established early in life, even before birth. For example, stressed mothers have higher levels of cortisol. The fetuses in their wombs adapt to their hormonal environment by developing a high tolerance for cortisol even before birth, and they carry these set points with them into childhood.

Caregiver System and the Two Goals

Goal 1: Healthy Mental Model of “WE”

- This develops from how adults attune with each other and the baby and how adults meet the needs of themselves and of the baby, especially during times of distress.
- Attunement allows us to help the infant make sense of their inner world of sensations and emotions.
- Attachment allows the infant to feel a “felt sense of safety” within, ultimately leading to a healthy mental model of relationships or a sense of being a “WE”.
- Attunement makes attachment possible creating a template of how we believe our needs will be met (deserve to be met) the rest of our lives until we consciously change them.

Goal 2: Healthy Mental Model of “I”

- This mental model develops in response to how adults handle the baby’s wants, likes and interests.
- How adults set limits and encourage a baby’s exploration create set points about motivation, attention and risk-taking.
- Since our needs are related to survival, infants adapt by sacrificing their sense of “I”, their wants, likes and preferences to ensure their needs will be met.
- This creates a beginning mental model of the self whether capable or not capable, whether worthy or not, or motivated or not.

Three Goals that Impact Our Lives Forever

1. How do I develop a healthy **WE** in which my needs are met? (internal working model of relationships)
2. How do I develop a healthy **I** in which my wants are encouraged and acknowledged? (internal working model of sense of self)
3. How do I pull my **I** out of our **WE** in a balanced way, solving the human dilemma?

Human Dilemma:

How do I remain close to others without losing my sense of self?

AND

How do I maintain distance without losing my relationships?



WE

- A healthy **WE** requires we learn how to get our needs met in healthy ways through communication and connection.
- Being in relationship with others is a universal need to survive. Our brain is a social brain and develops through social and emotional interactions.
- Our mental model of **WE** is defined through attunement and attachment with others.

I

- Healthy **I** requires we know what we want, what we like and know how to get it without others having to lose.
- It is the joy of being with oneself and sense of mastery and agency.
- Our mental model of **I** is uniquely ours in that it develops around our wants, which are uniquely our own.
- Our mental model of **I** is defined through our autonomous development through the separation and individuation process and how adults set limits and encourage exploration.

Closeness is defined by our perception of what we believe our needs to be. Needs are universal and are essential for survival (**We**).

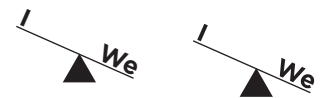


Balanced

Our sense of self is defined by our perception of our ability to get what we want/like and know what we want/like. Wants are individual and define our uniqueness (**I**).

Fear of Abandonment

With this fear, we are constantly afraid of being alone and having no closeness. We often cling to but don't trust our partner. We don't leave them alone and misunderstand their need for alone time, thinking it means, "You don't love me." Our sense of self is sacrificed for the maintenance of the relationship.



Unbalanced

- I want what you want.
- I like what you like.
- I don't care, it's up to you.
- I don't know, whatever you think.

Fear of Intimacy

With this fear, we are constantly afraid of losing our sense of self. We work long hours, refuse to make commitments, or pull away into books or hobbies. We misunderstand our partner's need for time together and closeness, thinking it means, "You're suffocating me." Our sense of self is more important than the relationship.



Unbalanced

- I need space.
- There's nothing wrong with having hobbies, loving golf, etc.
- I'm not around as much because I work long and hard for the family.
- I love you. Isn't that enough? We don't need a commitment.

